Biology, Hyderabad has taken up a project entitled "Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (LACONES)" to develop and apply modern methods of DNA technology and reproductive biology technology for socially relevant problems related to conservation of endangered species of animals. The main objectives of the project are to study the genetic variability in the endangered wild animals of India, to develop molecular probes for genotyping of the animals and to develop assisted reproductive technologies to facilities increase in their numbers by human intervention, if the situation demands.

(b) and (c)Centre has not been able to take up cloning of Cheetah because living tissue of Cheetah are not available in India. Efforts are being made to procure Cheetah/living tissue of Cheetah from Iran through the Central Zoo Authority of India as Cheetah found in Iran is very similar to Indian Cheetah. The question of cloning of Cheetah will arise only if suitable living material of Cheetah becomes available.

Relaxations for public sector steel companies

†304. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA' : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the concessions announced last year by Government have not benefited the public sector steel companies, as expected;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the details of steps taken to improve the conditions of Rourkela Steel Plant?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI BRAJ KISHORE TRIPATHY): (a) and (b) The Govt. of India, in Feb., 2000 has approved a financial and business restructuring package for Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) with a view to making it viable and profitable. This proposal, *inter alia*, includes divestment of non-core assets of SAIL including conversion of Indian Iron and Steel Co. (IISCO), a loss making subsidiary of SAIL, into a joint venture. This restructuring package also includes (i) waiver of loans from Steel Development Fund (SDF) and from Govt. of India, (ii) provision of Govt. guarantee of Rs.1500 crore with 50% interest subsidy for financing reduction in manpower through VRS and (iii) Govt. guarantee for loan and interest thereon of Rs.1500 crore for meeting repayment obligation.

As a result of restructuring proposals approved by Govt. losses for the year 2000-01 has been cut down by about 58% of the previous year loss.

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

However, the loss during April—Dec. 01 is higher with reference to the corresponding period last year by about 85% due to following reasons:

(i) Stagnation in steel consumption due to slow down in the economy.

(ii) Over supply situation in the domestic market.

(iii) Fall in international prices due to global recession and increase in antidumping cases in USA, Canada, European Union etc. has also adversely affected sales realisation in the domestic as well as international market.

(iv) Targets of divestment of non-crore assets have not been achieved because of opposition by political parties and trade unions or in some cases, a lack of response to the offer for disinvestments leading to non relisation of desired results as envisaged.

(c) SAIL has taken the following measures to improve the conditions of Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP):

- As a result of intensive cost control drive launched by SAIL in the year 1997, RSP has been able to contain variable cost at a lower level than as compared to 1996-97 after absorbing input cost escalations.
- Implementation of Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) for employees based on deferred payment basis in 1998 and 1999 resulted in separation of 3820 employees. In February 2001, SAIL introduced VR Scheme based on DPE pattern and thereby 1251 employees opted for VRS in RSP. Another VR Scheme has been launched on similar pattern in January' 02.
- Market oriented production and product-mix, increasing sales net work, more focus on customer satisfaction, etc.
- Government has also divested, during 2000-01, Captive Power Plants-II of RSP, identified for divestment under Business Restructuring package.

Nationaal Steel Institute, Puri

305. SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM : Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether a National Steel Institute has been set up and inaugurated at Puri in Orissa, to help the Steel Industry to face international competition, by carrying out training and research;